

Designing quality materials for teacher education

Theme: Formal Education Sub-theme: Revamping Teacher Education

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INTRODUCTION

Obtaining constructively critical feedback from students, as a starting point for redesigning materials, has been widely advocated and generally accepted as unproblematic in much of the distance education literature (e.g. Evans, 1995; Woodley, 1998; Potter, 1998; Shubani & Okebukola, 2001). However, my attempt to obtain such feedback from a cohort of teacher-learners enrolled for a Further Diploma in English Language Teaching was an instructive failure. While there was evidence in their assignments of misunderstandings of both content and activity instructions, they responded to questionnaires (completed anonymously) and to focus group interview questions, mainly as 'satisfied customers' (Reed, 2005: 270). They praised the materials, were silent about any difficulties they had experienced and made very few suggestions for changes. In reflecting on these responses I realized that I had not given my informants sufficient access to and control of the 'liberating literacy' (a new Discourse in Gee's (1996) terms) that I expected them to use. However, even had I done so, 'the histories of these teachers in apartheid South Africa may have made it difficult for them to contest the perceived expertise of a university academic' (Reed, 2005: 273).

While reflecting on their histories and identities, I read Moletsane's (2003) critique of teacher education in South Africa. She argues that teacher educators' failure to focus on factors that shape the identities of teachers has limited the impact of programmes which aim to improve teaching practices in schools. Such programmes need to recognize and respond to teachers' diverse 'life histories':

... curriculum transformation needs to develop programmes that aim to address all kinds of identities that student teachers bring if it is to contribute ultimately to the development of an effective teaching force (Moletsane, 2003: 325).

I also read Norton's (2000) longitudinal case study of immigrant women learning English in Canada in which she argues that it is important to consider the 'investment' of these women in language learning:

... when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in a target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space (Norton, 2000: 10-11).

In reviewing a range of international and local publications on designing and evaluating distance learning materials (e.g. Evans, 1994; Lockwood, 1992, 1994, 1995; Mills and Tait, 1996; Race, 1989, 1992; Rowntree, 1990, SAIDE, 2002; Commonwealth of Learning, 2003; NADEOSA, 2005) I found helpful guidelines for some aspects of mediating knowledge and skills on the page or screen, but little or no reference to issues of identity and investment. None of these authors or organizations really address what I consider to be one of the key questions for designers and evaluators of materials for teacher education: *What subject positions are constituted for learner-teachers (as students and as future teachers) or for teacher-learners (as professionals in the classroom and as students) when knowledge is mediated in particular ways on the page or screen?*

To respond to this question I have drawn on the extensive literatures on pedagogy, teacher education, mediation, subjectivity, systemic functional linguistics and social semiotics to devise a framework for what I term **critical pedagogic analysis** of distance learning materials for teacher education. In this paper I outline elements of this framework and illustrate (very briefly) how I have used it to analyze some South African teacher education

materials. These are *Learners and Learning* (designed for a national readership of pre-service and in-service, primary and secondary school teachers); *Language in Learning & Teaching (LILT)* (designed for a national readership of primary and secondary school in-service teachers); *Language Literacy and Communication, Imithamo 1-6* (designed for in-service primary school teachers in the Eastern Cape province). All have received either an award or commendation for excellence in distance education materials design.

DESIGNING A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL PEDAGOGIC ANALYSIS OF TEACHER EDUCATION MATERIALS

One of the main aims of critical pedagogic analysis (CPA) is to uncover the social interests at work in teacher education materials. Janks (2010) argues that in post-structuralist, neo-Marxist discourses, the primary concern of critical textual analysis is to reveal how power works in a text to privilege or to subjugate particular subjects and particular disciplinary knowledges (Janks, 2010: 35-36). With Gore's (1993) and Bernstein's (1996) conceptualization of pedagogy as 'the process of knowledge construction' as a point of departure, key questions for a critical pedagogic analysis of teacher education texts are:

- how and in whose interests is knowledge produced and reproduced?
- who do the designers consider to be the 'ideal subject' – as student and as teacher?
- who may be advantaged or disadvantaged by a particular constitution of this ideal subject?
- what actions of this subject are sanctioned or 'prohibited'?

The theoretical and empirical work on pedagogy of Basil Bernstein (1996; 1999), Suresh Canagarajah (1999, 2005) and Allan Luke (2008) enables these general questions to become more focused. For example, in mediating knowledge (and skills) on the page or screen, how do designers classify and frame disciplinary knowledges (Bernstein, 1996, 1999)? Is their orientation towards "mainstream" or "critical" pedagogies (Canagarajah, 1999, 2005)? What might be gained by weaving together elements of traditional pedagogies with elements of more dialogic critical pedagogies (Luke, 2008)?

With acknowledgement to Vygotsky, Lantolf and Thorne define mediation as 'the process through which humans deploy culturally constructed artifacts, concepts and activities to regulate (i.e. gain voluntary control over and transform) the material world of their own and each other's social and mental activity' (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006: 79). For distance education, what is significant about this definition is that it includes, as did Vygotsky (1978), both the self and others as agents in the mediating process.

I argue that a CPA of distance learning materials for teacher education needs to include a focus on how designers use the following to mediate knowledge and to offer particular subject positions to readers as students and as teachers:

- content selection
- in-text activities – types and purpose(s)
- illustrative cases or "pedagogic episodes" (Loughran, 2006)
- the scaffolding (if any) of readings
- linguistic choices
- choices of images and other aspects of visual design
- organization and other aspects of layout

Analyzing content selections

From a review of the work of acknowledged leaders in the field of teacher education (e.g. Alexander, 2008; Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Loughran, 2006; Morrow, 2007) I have identified six 'content elements' common to their conceptualizations of a knowledge base for teacher education. For this paper, each one is illustrated with an example of content on the topic 'Reading' in materials for language teachers:

subject / disciplinary knowledge - material that relates to theories and research about reading

pedagogic knowledge - material that relates to methods of teaching reading

knowledge of how learners learn - material that relates to what is involved in learning to read, both cognitive processes and sociocultural processes

knowledge of the curriculum - material that focuses on current curriculum statements about reading and their 'translation' into classroom practice

contextual knowledge – material that locates reading and the teaching of reading in sociocultural context

knowledge of self as learner and teacher – at a metacognitive level this includes material that promotes reflection on past and present learning and teaching practices but also on other factors contributing to identity formation, including identity as a reader

To these elements I have added *academic literacy* because in contexts in which many students are using an additional language for their studies, materials designers frequently include support for the extension of academic reading and writing competencies.

Table 1 in the Appendix illustrates how I have used these elements to identify what the designers of three sets of South African teacher education materials chose to foreground, background or ignore in selecting content on the topic 'Reading'. The designers of *Learners and Learning* offer readers theories about learning to read and reading to learn and expect them to reflect on the implications of these theories for their practices as adult learners and as teachers. They offer very little guidance in regard to classroom practice. The designers of *Language, Literacy and Communication, Umthamo 2* foreground pedagogic knowledge. They offer support for teacher-learners' experiential learning in their classrooms and communities. The designers of *Language in Learning & Teaching* weave together subject knowledge, pedagogic knowledge and academic literacy. Each design constitutes student and teacher identities differently.

Analyzing in-text activities

Guidelines for designing distance education materials emphasize the key role(s) of in-text activities in enabling learning (e.g. Lockwood, 1994; Moon, Leach & Stevens, 2005; NADEOSA, 2005). From a review of local and international teacher education materials, I have identified five categories of 'activity purpose' and have used these in conjunction with Lockwood's (1994) three models of activity types (tutorial in print; reflective action guide; dialogue) to identify the dominant purposes and types evident in the materials listed above. By way of example, Table 2 in the Appendix shows that in their unit on Reading, the designers of *Language in Learning & Teaching* have included activities which address all five purposes, while privileging reflective action. In materials designed to contribute to in-service teachers' professional development, this emphasis on reflection seems likely to encourage readers' investment: their experience is acknowledged as a foundation for further learning.

When content and in-text activities are brought together in analysing the overall design of a teacher education text, one of the three orientations to teacher learning proposed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) is likely to be dominant: (i) subject / 'book-based' knowledge *for* practice; (ii) practice-based knowledge *in* practice; (iii) metaknowledge *of* subject and practice in relation to each other and to context.

Analyzing cases or pedagogic episodes

Shulman (2004) advocates the use of cases as one way of representing knowledge to teacher education students and argues that while a case is itself a way of mediating knowledge, it must in turn be mediated by being 'explicated, interpreted, argued, dissected and reassembled' (2004: 209). Loughran (2006) suggests that cases create opportunities for questioning the taken for granted and 'invite inquiry into the diversity of possibilities and responses inherent in the problematic situations that arise in teaching and learning' (2006: 33). In a subsequent publication he argues that teacher educators should offer 'pedagogic episodes' (cases), to "students of teaching" for the purpose of informing their "developing views of practice" (2008: 1180). CPA is interested in the kinds of cases that materials designers select and in how they position readers to respond to them.

In the materials listed above, analysis of the cases / pedagogic episodes related to reading and the teaching of reading suggests that each design team's main purpose is the transformation of teachers' knowledges and practices. The dominant 'message' in these

episodes is that teachers should act in 'new' ways in their classrooms and communities – ways that make learners excited about reading and that encourage multiple responses to texts (*Learners and Learning*); ways that result in the preservation of traditional tales and their use in the classroom for 'whole language' activities and for affirming the isiXhosa language (*Language, Literacy and Communication, Umthamo 2*); ways that result in the establishment of parent-child reading clubs or other community literacy projects (*Language in Learning & Teaching*).

Analyzing the scaffolding of course readings

While recognizing that 'scaffolding' is a contested concept, I find useful Gibbons' (2002) description of scaffolding as 'the temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learner know how to do something so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone' (2002: 10). I suggest that it is important to understand how designers constitute students as particular types of reading subjects and teachers when they offer support for reading extracts from the work of authorities in a particular field. By way of example, the designers of both *Learners and Learning* and of *Language, Literacy and Communication Umthamo 2* construct students as inexperienced readers of academic texts. While the designers of *Learners and Learning* include questions to their readers such as 'What do you think?', their insertion of sub-headings into extracts from the work of internationally recognized theorists and empirical researchers, together with their commentary on the extracts, position readers to accept the designers' interpretations of these extracts. The designers of *Language, Literacy and Communication, Umthamo 2* arguably aim for a similar outcome but they do this by guiding readers through a series of activities so that they experience a whole language approach to literacy teaching before they read an extract which describes what they are likely to have just experienced.

Analyzing linguistic choices

Designers of distance learning materials draw on the experiential, interpersonal and textual metafunctions of language (Halliday, 1978, 1985) to mediate content and to constitute a relationship between themselves and their imagined readers. Table 3 in the Appendix lists the linguistic features that I have used for CPA of teacher education materials. It should be noted that the relationship between designers and readers is not only constituted through such discourse features as modality and pronoun choice, but also through the overall structure of the discourse. Writing that is 'dense, structured and productlike' and writing that is conversational and 'processlike' (Halliday, 1994: 70) mediate knowledge differently and the differences may influence how readers process and use this knowledge for a range of purposes, including identity construction.

Analyzing images and other aspects of visual design

In distance learning materials the designers' choice of cover design and their use of diagrams, drawings, photographs and access devices (such as icons and margin boxes) all contribute to the constitution of readers as particular 'types' of student and, in the case of materials for teacher education, as particular types of teacher. I have used Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design to inform the CPA of the covers of the materials listed above and of elements of the visual designs 'between the covers' (See Reed, 2008 for an analysis of the cover designs). Here I insert just one example of two image choices from the same page of *Language, Literacy and Communication, Umthamo 2* and comment briefly on their potentials for shaping readers' subjectivities.

Figure 1.1 Zozo Figlan drawing

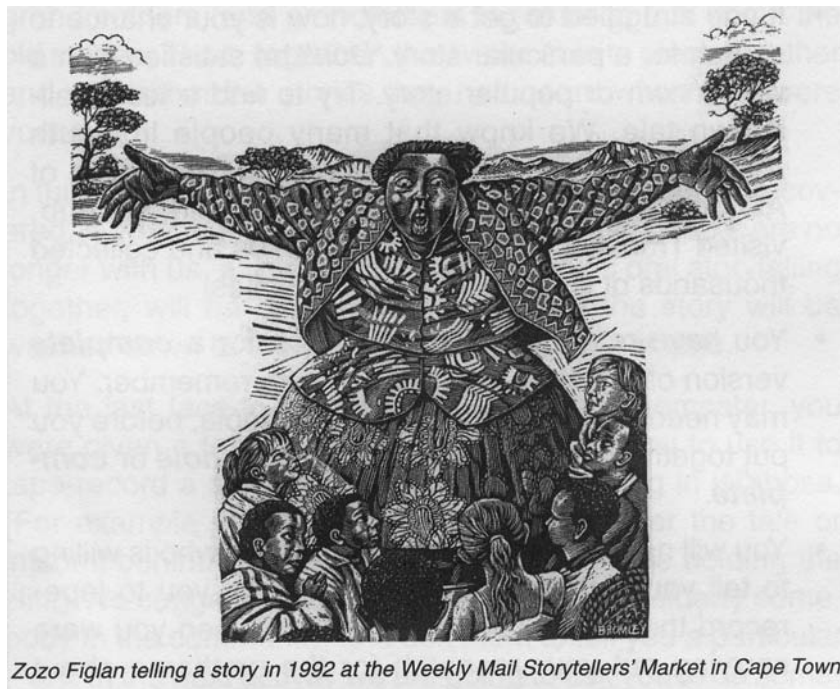


Figure 1.2 Mrs Zenani photograph



The open spaces of rural, traditional communities behind the powerful, central figure suggest that these are the sources of the stories that Zozo Figlan performs energetically for the multicultural audience of urban children at her feet. In the slightly blurred photograph, below the drawing, children also gaze at the storyteller, but this storytelling is presented to readers as a very different event. Firstly, it is located in an evidently rural setting and in the past: Mrs Zenani 'told' her tale – in contrast to Zozo Figlan who is 'telling' hers. Secondly, the caption positions the reader to respond with admiration: Mrs Zenani is a 'gifted iintsomi teller' and she told an 'epic' tale. The adjectives amplify the positive attitude of the designers to the event (Martin & Rose, 2003). The placement of the drawing above the photograph and its greater sharpness make it the more salient (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) of the two images. It could

be argued that this greater salience contributes to what the designers are offering teachers: as collectors and performers of traditional stories they have an important role to play in bringing what is admirable in the local and traditional past into contact with the local and global present.

Analyzing organization and other aspects of layout

In order to encourage their interest and investment in learning, distance education materials need to be accessible to students. Rowntree (1994) groups access devices into three categories: beginning, during and end. He advises that the beginning should include an explanatory title, contents list, a 'route map', overview / introduction, links with other materials, objectives and guidance on using the materials. 'During' the materials there should be headings, numbering systems, summaries, instructions about what to do next, verbal signposts and graphic signals such as 'white space', reader stoppers, icons, bulleted lists, tints and boxes. An index is an example of an end point device. CPA is interested in which of these devices are used by designers and in how they use them. For example, in the materials I have analyzed, the use of margin boxes constitutes readers in significantly different ways. In *Language, Literacy and Communication, Umthamo 2*, the margin boxes focus on teachers' pedagogy with the designers prescribing actions for teachers to take in their classrooms as in 'Don't try to impose or push your ideas onto your learners' story. Remember, you are developing a learner-centred way of working' (LLC, Umthamo 2, 1999: 35). By contrast, in *Learners and Learning* the designers focus on readers as students and on the extension of their academic literacy: the margin boxes repeat key ideas from the main text, scaffold the completion of reading-based activities and give bibliographic details of texts on which the designers have drawn.

CONCLUSION

I am aware that the process of designing, analyzing and redesigning is cyclical because:

... every new design serves a different set of interests. Because all texts are positioned and positioning, each redesign becomes a new text that requires deconstruction. No design is neutral. (Janks, 2010: 183)

However, I argue that what I have constituted as critical pedagogic analysis affords materials designers and evaluators understandings of how knowledge is mediated in particular instantiations of teacher education materials and of how this mediation may affect readers' investment in both their studies and their professional development as teachers. Two questions to be addressed by designers and evaluators of teacher education materials are (i) whether the subject positions offered to ideal readers (Hall, 1980) are likely to encourage their investment in the materials as university students and as classroom teachers, and (ii) whether the ways in which knowledge is mediated on the page or screen are likely to yield good returns (Norton, 2000) for these readers on their investment.

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Appendix : Tables 1 to 3 on following pages

Table 1: Designers' content choices for a section or unit on Reading in three South African teacher education texts

Elements of a knowledge base for teaching	<i>Learners and Learning, Learning Guide Section 4</i> pages 113-148; Reader Section 4 pages 131-166	<i>Language in Learning & Teaching, Learning Guide Unit 2</i> pages 57-82 Reader Chapter 4 pages 155-168	<i>Language, Literacy and Communication, Umthamo 2</i> pages 1-48
Subject/disciplinary knowledge	LG: Learning to read (114-115) LG: What kinds of reading support school learning? (128-9; 131-132); LG: Different levels of reading (134-135) Reader: The act of study (133-136); The magic of reading (137-144); Guided adventures in learning (145-153)	LG: Importance of reading/learning to read/reading theory (57, 59, 61-62) LG: Different genres for different purposes (76-79) Reader: Understanding the reading process (155-168)	Whole language: the easy way to language development (38-42)
Pedagogic knowledge	LG: Developing active and independent readers (132-134) Reader: Developing communities of reading and learning (154-166)	LG: Textbook survey (58); Teaching reading in grade 1 (65); Making reading a focus of content lessons (71); Designing and using a reading questionnaire (73-75); Strategies for teaching/encouraging reading across the curriculum (80-82)	Classroom management and timetabling (2 & 4-9; Collecting iintsomi: (16-24); Using iintsomi in the classroom (25-36); Appendix: Making a Big Book (43-48)
Knowledge of how learners learn	LG: Module title; LG: What happens when we read a book? (116-119); Why is reading so difficult? (119-123); What makes reading a meaningful experience? (124-126)	LG: Introduction of metacognition (59) Reader: Understanding the reading process (155-168)	Benefits for learners of an integrated curriculum (10-13)
Knowledge of the curriculum	LG: Languages Learning Area (137); OBE (144-		OBE: (2); Languages Learning Area (23)

Elements of a knowledge base for teaching	<i>Learners and Learning, Learning Guide Section 4</i> pages 113-148; Reader Section 4 pages 131-166	<i>Language in Learning & Teaching, Learning Guide Unit 2</i> pages 57-82 Reader Chapter 4 pages 155-168	<i>Language, Literacy and Communication, Umthamo 2</i> pages 1-48
	145)		
Contextual knowledge	LG: EAL readers (117); EAL readers' homes (126); Literacy in Africa: (127)	LG: References to EAL readers (60, 64, 66-67); Reading contexts in SA (68); Resource constraints in schools (82)	Oral literature (2); Collecting an intsoni: (16-18 &25); An intsoni presented in both isiXhosa & English (19-21); Giving status to all languages of our province (23)
Knowledge of self as learner and teacher	LG: Responses to 'half-truths' about reading (113); Views on differences between spoken & written language (115); Reflections on own experiences of learning to read/being a reader: (121 & 125); Own views on teaching reading (122, 126 & 143) Reader: Personal response to ideas in readings (144 & 150)	LG: Reflecting on self as young reader and as reader of academic texts (59,60,63, 64); Reflecting on teaching (68); Reflecting on views on reading (72) Reader: Reflecting on self as adult reader (155)	Reflections on work experiences; position on school timetables: (4,6,8,12); Reflections on experiencing 'whole language' (15-16); Reflections on story-collecting experiences: (24, 26); Reflection on using the stories in the classroom (28 &31 & 33 &35)
Academic literacy	LG: Note-making: (115 &125); turning notes into academic discourse (125); Understanding text structures (139-141)	LG: Surveying study material (58); Previewing a text (59); making notes & scanning a text for specific information (68)	

Table 2 A classification by purpose(s) and model(s) of activities in *Language in Learning & Teaching (LILT)*, Unit 2, 'Teaching Reading'

Academic literacy	Reflections on experiences	Content knowledge	Pedagogic knowledge	Classroom resources
Activity 20 (2)				Activity 20 (2)
Activity 21 (2)	Activity 21 (2)	Activity 21 (2)		
Activity 22 (1)		Activity 22 (2)		
	Activity 23 (2)			
		Activity 24 (1)	Activity 24 (1)	
Activity 25 (1)	Activity 25 (2)	Activity 25 (1)		
	Activity 26 (1/3)	Activity 26 (1/3)	Activity 26 (2)	Activity 26 (2)
	Activity 27 (1)	Activity 27 (1)		
		Activity 28 (1)		
	Activity 29 (2)	Activity 29 (2)	Activity 29 (2)	
	Activity 30 (2)			

(1): tutorial in print; (2): reflective action guide; (3): dialogue

Table 3 Explanation of the linguistic features used in a critical pedagogic analysis of teacher education texts

Linguistic feature	Explanation
Lexicalisation	This term refers to a speaker / writer's choice or selection of words. Designers can use different words to construct the same idea differently
Pronouns	Speakers' or writers' pronoun choices position listeners or readers differently through (i) the use of first, second or third person; (ii) generic use of 'he' or 'she'; (iii) inclusive or exclusive use of 'we'; (iv) distinctions between 'us' and 'them'
Transitivity	This term is used for referring to speakers' and writers' choices of processes (verbs) in a text. The main processes are: <i>material</i> – doing; <i>relational</i> – being or having; <i>mental</i> – thinking, feeling, perceiving; <i>verbal</i> – 'saying'; <i>behavioural</i> – physiological ; <i>existential</i>
Voice	Active and passive voice construct participants in a clause as active 'doers' or passive 'done-tos'. The agent ('doer') of an action can be omitted when the passive is used: <i>The window was broken.</i>

Nominalisation	This process is sometimes referred to as 'nouncing a verb'. A process (verb) is transformed into an event or object or state: <i>Environmentalists opposed (verbal process) the new dam. There was opposition (nominalisation) from environmentalists to the new dam.</i>
Mood	A clause can be a statement (declarative), question (interrogative), offer, or command (directive / imperative) which positions a listener or reader to interact in particular ways with a spoken or written text . "...questions assume that readers have answers, statements that readers need information, and commands presuppose the right to tell others what to do" (Janks, 2010, p. 78)
Modality	To express 'degrees' of certainty / uncertainty or of social obligation, speakers or writers choose a particular modal (e.g. may, should, must) or modal adjunct (e.g. possibly, always). Modality may be high (certain), median or low (uncertain)
Polarity	Polarity is linked to modality. At one 'pole' is definite 'yes' and at the other, definite 'no': <i>This is a cat. This isn't a cat.</i> The present tense is used to indicate that statements are absolutely certain and true for all time
Theme in the clause	This is the first unit of meaning in a clause: <i>Our cat died last Saturday. Last Saturday our cat died.</i> Units of meaning are foregrounded by being placed in theme position
Rheme in the clause	This is the information that follows the theme.
Logical connectors	Writers use these words and phrases (often conjunctions such as <i>although, however, therefore</i>) to make connections in a text and to structure arguments.
Intensifiers, adjectives, adverbs	These are used to express attitude, judgement, strength of feelings, etc (as do choice of polarity and modality): <i>The engineer made a very (intensifier) serious (adjective used to express a judgment) design error.</i>

Explanations derived from Droga and Humphrey (2002); Halliday (1978, 1985); Janks (2010); Martin & Rose (2003); Polias (2001); Unsworth (2001).